

The Burr Homestead
Fairfield, Connecticut
Fairfield Co.

HABS No. ^{CT} 3-17

HABS
CONN
1-FAIRF,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District #3

Historic American Buildings Survey
Harold H. Davis, District Officer
29 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Conn.

Thaddeus Burr Homestead
Fairfield, ConnecticutHABS No. ^{CT-}3-17

"The Thaddeus Burr property on the main street of Fairfield is rich in historic associations. The first house was destroyed when the British fired the town. The present edifice is a mansion noteworthy for its stateliness, amplitude and quiet elegance, suggestive of colonial charm and hospitality. It was built ¹⁷⁹⁰ for Thaddeus Burr by Daniel Deinon (also spelled Dimon), a popular carpenter-architect of the 18th century. It is three stories high and the rooms are large and high between joints, a great hall making welcome the guests as they entered through the classic portico and ample doorway. The fan-shaped window above the entrance and the generous leaded glass at the sides gave cheer to the place. The old fashioned garden in the rear, with its long walks and fine array of flowers our forefathers loved, takes one back into the dim past until one is lost in shadowy reminiscences.

The mansion was enlarged and altered by Mr. Obadiah O. Jones in the forties, after his purchase of the property from General Gershom Burr, who had inherited it from his uncle, Thaddeus Burr. His children succeeded their father in its possession.

Mr. Wheeler purchased the property from the Jones family and later sold it to Mr. A. Holland Forbes, prominent in the development of aeronautic science of the United States. It is now the pro-

Thaddeus Burr Homestead

-2-

perty of Mr. De Ver H. Warner.

It is currently reported that after the former mansion standing on this site was burned by the British, General Hancock, the intimate friend of Mr. Burr and a frequent visitor at the Homestead, promised to give him the glass and the timbers for a new house in case he would model it after the Hancock house in Boston. We should like to believe that General Hancock followed this generous impulse, but the fact that he never erected a stone over the grave of his aunt, from whom, as the widow of his uncle, he inherited a part of his wealth, induces in us a fair degree of doubt on the subject. Furthermore, we do not know the date of the new mansion. Professor Marsh, in his life of Professor Silliman, quotes from Mr. Silliman's recollections of Fairfield and notes that an old store or warehouse on the estate was converted into a dwelling and used by Mr. and Mrs. Burr. It made what he calls "a neat and commodious mansion". The mansion destroyed by the British is set down in the catalogue of losses as worthy sixteen hundred pounds, the largest valuation of property in the record of losses.

An enumeration of visitors who came to share the hospitality of these two notable people would constitute a register of the famous men who for two

Thaddeus Burr Homestead

-3-

1

generations passed through this ancient town. The Adamses, the Quincys, the Hancocks, Franklin, Washington, Lee, Trumbull, Silas Deane, Roger Sherman, Samuel Johnson, Dr. Dwight, Joel Barlow and David Humphrey; poets, artists, statesmen, generals, public benefactors, and private citizens in every walk of life were welcomed, and as Dr. Dwight says, charmed by the atmosphere of the house. The property came down through several generations of Burrs. Chief Justice Burr about 1700 built the mansion destroyed by the British some seventy-nine years later.

The romantic period in a panoramic view of this property's history might be defined as the time when Dorothy Quincy, affianced to John Hancock, was awaiting his pleasure while the dashing and seductive young Aaron Burr rode down from Litchfield as occasion offered and defied convention and the courtly president of the Continental Congress by stolen interviews with the young lady guarded by "Aunt Hancock".

Compiled by

Harold H. Davis

Sources: "Old Houses of Connecticut". Edited by Bertha Chadwick Trowbridge. Pages 400 to 404 inclusive.
"An Historic Mansion". Being an account of the Thaddeus Burr Homestead by Frank S. Child.

Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE THADDEUS BURR
HOMESTEAD

Materials used in building: Wood

Foundations: Field stone held together with lime mortar; cut blocks above grade.

Cellar: Floor flagged with blue stone; basement kitchen.

First Floor: A drawing room on right connected by glass door with library. Dining room on left. Kitchen, pantries and passage in rear, with a veranda enclosed in glass used as a sitting room overlooking the garden with a view of Long Island Sound.

Second and Third Floors: Chambers

Attic: Under main roof

Chimneys: Two massive brick chimneys with stone bases about twelve feet square.

Hall: Forty feet deep, twelve feet wide.

Main stairway: In alcove at west side of hall.

Rail: On both sides, one against wall.

Banisters: Turned, two on each tread.

Newel Post: Square paneled with moulded cap.

Additions to main structure: Leanto contains sitting room inclosed in glass. West ell: The second library. East ell: Pantries, closets and entry.

Roof: Pitch; shingled.

Side walls: Originally shingled.

Corners of house: Pilasters with carved capitals, paneled and moulded base.

Main entrance: Center, front.

Main doorway: Arched with carved frames for side lights. Door, single, paneled with glass. Fastened by modern lock.

Other entrances: Into library on west side; back entrances.

House faces: North

Windows: North, fourteen; south, thirteen; east, eight; west, nine.

Thaddeus Burr Homestead
Technical description

Ornamental windows: With geometrical patterns in the gables.

Shutters: Outside blinds.

Porches: Across front of house. Six large pillars with capitals support a flat roof with a heavy cornice which projects above windows of second story.

INTERIOR

Cornice: Modern ornamental in dining room and bedrooms.

Wall cupboards: In glass cases between parlor and library

Fireplaces: In ten rooms. Brick-oven in basement kitchen.

Mantels: Parlor, library and dining room, colored marble. Four second-story bed chambers, white marble. Three third-story bed chambers, wood with hand cut mouldings to shelves supported by pilasters.

Doors: Very heavy with vertical paneling.

Shutters: Inside

Wainscoting: Hall

Paneling: Beneath the windows in front rooms in first and second story.

Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.

¹ See also the following references:

Old Houses of Connecticut, National Society
Colonial Dames of America, 1923, pp. 400-407.
Gardens of Colony and State, vol. 1, pp. 126-28.

- H.C.F. 1/36.